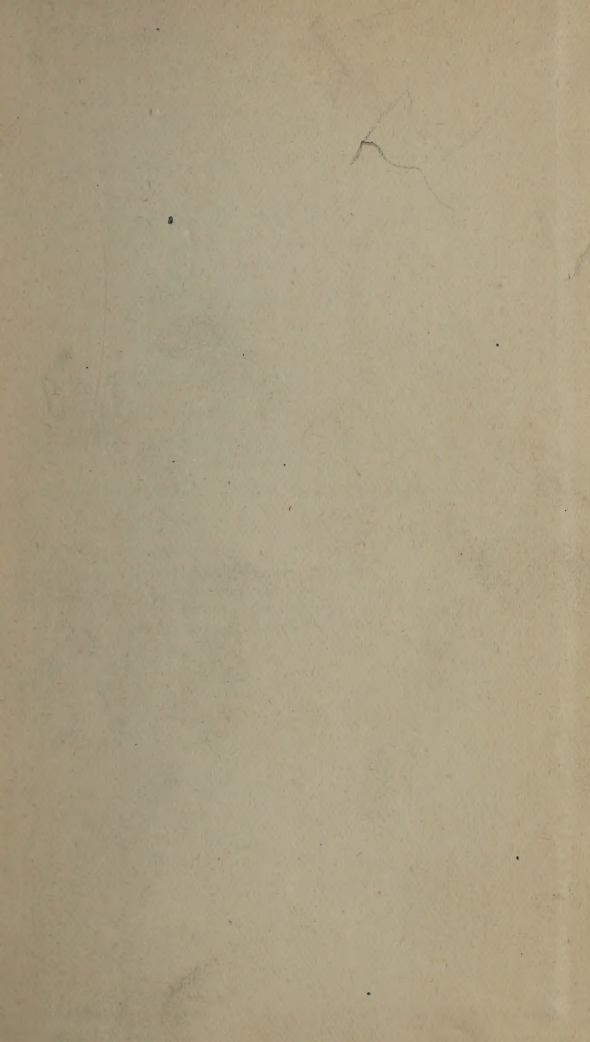




No 4265.392



GIVEN BY



TRACT FOR THE TIMES.
NO. 18.

24

1727
LETTER

TO

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Rev. Jason Whitman,

BY A

(SOUTHERNER.)

AND

4265.392

MR. WHITMAN'S REPLY.

OCCASIONED BY THE

"PROTEST OF UNITARIAN MINISTERS
AGAINST AMERICAN SLAVERY."

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"And they assaulted the house of Jason, . . . crying, Those that have turned the world upside down, are come here also; whom Jason hath received; and these all do contrary, to the decrees of Caesar, saying, there is another king, one Jesus." Acts 17th chap. 5th and 6th verses.

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BOSTON

OFFICE OF THE CHRISTIAN WORLD.

1845.

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THE SOUTHERNER'S LETTER.

SAVANNAH, Oct. 22d.

MR. WHITMAN, Dear Sir:—A number of the Register has been in circulation here, in which we have seen your name, affixed to a protest against Slavery. Have you, my dear sir, seriously considered what the consequence of such a step will be?

Unitarianism is in no good repute among us, and it is my serious belief that such a document as that will be the death-blow to it, and you are one that we hoped better things from; setting our faith aside, what earthly good do you think can be done by it? I will answer. I say none. Every such document rivets the chains tighter, and debars those you so much pity from the privileges they now enjoy. There are many here that deplore the existence of Slavery as much as you can, and if any

way can be pointed out by which it could be remedied, would join you in effecting it; but some reasonable way must be opened first. Can you point out any such? If not, we must look upon those of you, who signed that paper, as madmen, who would not hesitate to throw fire into powder. You are a man of good sense and were here long enough to see that the two races could not occupy the same country in peace. Now if we free them what will become of them? (setting aside the ruin it will bring upon us.) Will you take them North? For I assure you we *won't* have them here. Will you and your friends be willing to remunerate the widow and orphan when their all is taken from them? And who imposed this evil on us, but you Northerners? Who were more deeply engaged in slave-traffic than the men of Massachusetts? I acknowledge the evils you complain of in the low state of morals among them, but it is young men and old men from the North that encourage them in vice to a greater degree than our own people, who have too much pride to associate with them.

Mr. Whitman, I expected better things of you, we were low enough in the world's estimation without putting this upon us.

MR. WHITMAN'S REPLY.

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C
Lexington, ——— —.

MY DEAR SIR,—It has ever been a rule with me to take no notice of anonymous letters. I have received several such since I have been in the Christian Ministry. But I have ever felt, that no man could reasonably expect an answer to a letter, to which he had not seen fit to affix his name. But, in view of the importance of the subject, to which your letter relates, I have concluded to depart from my previously uniform practice, and insert an answer in the columns of the Register, to which paper it seems you have access. And I have taken the liberty to insert your letter, that so the readers might better understand the answer, and that the other signers of the Protest besides myself might enjoy the benefits of your suggestions.

In the above letter, it seems to be implied, that you have fears that, in affixing my name to the Protest against American Slavery, I have acted thoughtlessly. I can assure you that I

acted after the most serious considerations, and under the most solemn convictions. I will frankly state to you the course I have pursued, and the convictions under which I have acted. For years I was reading and reflecting upon American Slavery; studying the writings of Channing and others in regard to it, and availing myself of every thing, written in defence or in palliation of the system, which might come within my reach. Still, I watched for an opportunity to witness the operations and tendencies of the system for myself, before making up my mind in regard to it. At length, in the Providence of God, I was led, in the pursuit of health, to spend a winter in your beautiful city, supplying the pulpit of the Unitarian Society there, and visiting Charleston, S. C., for a few weeks on exchange. For the generous hospitality, the affectionate kindness, and the delicate sympathy of the Unitarians of Savannah and Charleston, I have ever cherished and still continue to cherish feelings of the most profound and heartfelt gratitude. Of the many pleasant acquaintances I have formed, I shall ever retain glad remembrances. When I went South, I was undecided in my mind upon the subject of Slavery. And I determined, before going, that as God in his Providence was offering me

the opportunity I had long wished for, I would go as an inquirer upon that subject, that I would seek to ascertain the facts of the case and make careful observations upon the tendencies of the system, and I would, on my return, compare the whole with the spirit and principles of the Gospel, and make up my mind upon the subject. This course I did conscientiously pursue. After having formed a decided opinion, I wrote to a person in Savannah, that the result was a deep abhorrence of the system of Slavery, accompanied by kind feeling and affectionate regard, for those, who were connected with the system, contrary to their wishes and convictions, by circumstances beyond their control. Thus you perceive that I have studied the subject; and, as far as I have been able, both sides of it. I have, for a time, watched the tendencies of the system and its influence upon both masters and slaves, while an eye-witness of its actual operations; and then I have sought for my duty, and compared what I had seen, with the teachings of Jesus, and with the principles and spirit of the Gospel. I have thus, my dear sir, frankly stated to you the process by which I have been led to my present convictions upon the subject of American Slavery, and which are in accord-

ance with the statements and positions of the Protest, to which my name is affixed. In the course which I have pursued, have I acted hastily, or in any way unbecoming a Christian Minister?

But your objection may not be so much to my opinions themselves, nor to the fact of my having embraced them, as to my having given utterance to them, by affixing my name to the Protest. But I can assure you, that it was not without the most careful reflection, that I took that step. The convictions under which I acted were these :

1st. It is with me a settled conviction, that no true word, uttered in a Christian spirit, can ever, in the long run, do hurt, but must, eventually, do good. Our Saviour uttered and bore witness to the truth, and truth too, opposed to the prejudices and practices of the Jews. It excited opposition and resulted in his death. Its utterance, then, seemed to be productive of evil at the time. But his utterance of the truth, though he himself suffered for having given it, has, in the long run, been productive of great good. And so it is with the utterance of all truth, which comes in contact with the prejudices and practices of the world. It may, at first, excite opposition, and seem, for a time, to

be productive of evil. But it results eventually in good. It is then with me, I repeat, a settled conviction, that the calm and quiet utterance of the truth, if it be uttered in a Christian spirit, will always be productive of good, in the long run. When, therefore, that Protest was put into my hands, I asked myself but two questions in regard to it. Does it give utterance to the truth? Is it written in a Christian spirit? Believing that these two questions may be answered in the affirmative, in regard to the Protest, I felt safe in affixing my name to it, in the conviction, that, although it might excite a little temporary opposition, it must eventually do good.

2d. The Gospel, of which I am a minister, requires me to do to others, as I would have others do to me. I had seen my fellow men and brothers bound in the chains of an oppressive slavery, for no fault of their own. I felt were I in their situation, I should wish that some brother man would raise in my behalf, the voice of remonstrance against the wrong and oppression, under which I might be suffering. Was I not bound, then, most solemnly by the Gospel requisitions, to do for others, what, in an exchange of circumstances, I might wish to have others do for me? Then too I have

seen my fellow men and brethren, from whom I had received substantial proofs of kindness, adhering to and sustaining a system, based, as I thought in sin, and fraught with evil, and I felt that, were I in their situation, had my fellow men the same opinion of any course which I might be pursuing, which I entertain of slave-holding, I ought to rejoice to have them point out to me its character, and protest against my continuance in it. Was I not bound then, by Gospel requisitions, and urged by the promptings of gratitude, to do to my brethren, engaged in slave-holding, what, in an exchange of circumstances, I ought to rejoice to have others do to me? And the circumstance that my fellow men and brethren were unconscious of the sinfulness of the system they were supporting, seemed to me to heighten my obligations to remonstrate with them in regard to it. I felt that it might be that God, in his Providence, had led me to my convictions, that I might utter them for the good of others, that he had imparted them to me as a sacred trust, to be dispensed by me for the good of my fellow men, under a solemn sense of my accountability to him.

3d. Although it is the duty of Christians and Christian Ministers to do all in their power

for the removal from the world of all wrong doing, wherever found, yet I will confess that I might not myself have felt so deeply my obligations, had it not been for a particular circumstance. At a discussion of the subject of Slavery, and of our duties as ministers of the Gospel in regard to it, last spring, a brother clergyman, whom I highly esteem, and who had enjoyed great advantages for a thorough knowledge of the whole subject, was reported to have said, (for I was not present) that he had heard slave-holders at the South allege, that the system of Slavery could not be so sinful as it has sometimes been represented, for, if it were, the ministers of the Gospel would speak out on the subject. It seemed from this remark, that the silence of the ministers of the Gospel at the North was speaking most powerfully and encouragingly, in the ears of slave-holders at the South, in favor of the system of Slavery. I said to myself, although I have ever tried to give the impression that I had no sympathies with slave-holding, yet it may be that some are looking to me as one, who rejects or refuses to speak out upon the subject, because I regard favorably the institution itself. And although the influence of so humble an individual as myself is at all times but little, yet even for

that little, I am accountable to God. I felt that it was impossible for me to occupy a position of moral neutrality, and therefore I chose to throw my influence, whatever it might be, in favor of what I regarded as the right. These are the principal reasons, by which I was influenced to affix my name to the Protest against American Slavery. I have acted under a solemn sense of my accountability to God, and according to the best light I have enjoyed.

You, sir, are placed in a very different position from that which I occupy, and you look at the whole subject from a different point of view. You fear that evil consequences must result from the issuing of that Protest. And what are the evil consequences you fear?

1st. First and principally you fear that the Protest will strike a death-blow to Unitarianism at the South. And why so, I ask? Is it because by that Protest it will be known at the South, that Unitarian ministers are honestly seeking to know, and to give utterance, in a Christian spirit, to the instructions of the Gospel upon all the moral evils, unholy customs and unholy institutions of the community, how deeply soever they may be imbedded in the affections of the people, how intimately and ex-

tensively soever they may be entwined with the various ramifications of society? Is it because by the Protest it will be known at the South, that a large number of Unitarian clergymen, at the North, are openly and decidedly opposed to the system of American Slavery? Are you aware, sir, what is implied in your remark that the Protest will be the death-blow to Unitarianism among you? Is it not that Unitarianism can spread at the South only when regarded as the friend of Slavery, or at least as willing to wink at and pass over its sin and evil? I value Unitarianism, because, as I read my Bible, it seems to me to express, more nearly than any other theological system, the truth there revealed. I have, in times past, put forth some efforts and made some sacrifices for the promotion of its spread and prevalence. I hope I shall ever be willing to do the same again, whenever in the Providence of God I am required so to do. But I ever wish it distinctly understood, that I value Unitarianism chiefly as an instrumentality — a divinely appointed instrumentality — for the promotion of personal holiness, and individual freedom from all wrong doing, and for securing, in that way, an entire renovation of the state of society. If Unitarianism is to be held as a mere abstract

theory and not as a principle; as a mere speculative belief, and not as a living power of active interference with all sin; I must confess that, for one, I should be much less anxious for its spread than I now am. If open and uncompromising oppositon to sin, in any and every form, on the part of the Unitarian ministry, when manifested in a kind and Christian manner, is to be the death-blow of Unitarianism in any society, or community, then I, for one, am ready to say, the sooner it is struck the better.

But, my dear sir, are you not looking in the wrong direction, in order to determine what will be the effects of that Protest upon the condition and prospects of Unitarianism at the South? You say "we were low enough in the world's estimation without putting this upon us." And is the *world's* estimation the object which Christianity is to seek, and the test by which its condition is to be judged? Is the *world's* estimation of such importance to the living power and rapid spread of the Gospel, that a compromise with sin is to be made in order to secure it? It seems to me that you are looking in a wrong direction. The question I should ask, in regard to any measure like that of the Protest, would be not whether it

might raise or sink the denomination in the *world's estimation*, but whether it corresponds with the revealed will of God, and the recorded instructions of Christ. But I must frankly say that I differ from you in opinion on this point. It is my honest belief, that the more any denomination becomes known as uncompromising in its opposition to all sin, and sincere and earnest in seeking personal holiness and social purity, the more will it be respected, even by the sinful and the profligate. Honest conscientiousness of purpose will always be respected, when manifested in connection with meekness and humility. And the known purity, freedom from sin, and devotion to holiness, the known decision, activity and energy in freeing the community from the moral evils which prevail, by which the general character of a denomination is marked, will prove a more powerful instrument in promoting its spread, than all wealth, talents and eloquence.

2nd. You say that every movement, like that of issuing the Protest, only rivets the chains of Slavery the tighter. And whose fault is this? I ask. Who is answerable for this result — those who utter the truth, in a Christian spirit, or those who allow their angry passions to drive them to the commission of still greater

sin? When the Jews were driven, by their angry passions, to the crucifixion of the holy Jesus, where was the fault — with Jesus, the heaven-sent teacher of truth, or with the malignant Jews, who accomplished that nefarious deed? When tumults were excited in opposition to the Apostles, whereby sin was committed, who was in fault — the Apostles, for proclaiming the truth, or the multitude, for the indulgence of unholy passions? Must the truth never be spoken, for fear that those, whose practices it condemns, should be disturbed, aroused to anger and driven by their passions to more open and violent opposition? Must wrong-doing never be rebuked, lest those who are guilty should be indignant and perverse? Must the chains of Slavery be forever left untouched, because the attempt to break them will for a time draw them tighter than before? Should every movement, then, like the issuing of the Protest, rivet the chains of Slavery tighter than before, still I cannot see that the fault rests upon those who have, in that way, given utterance to the truth, in a Christian spirit. It must, as it seems to me, rest upon other shoulders than theirs. And I am confident that this can be only a temporary incon-

venience, introductory to a more glorious result — the final triumph of truth and justice.

3rd. You think that the wrongs and evils of Slavery are not to be spoken of, until a reasonable and perfect remedy is proposed. But this seems to me to be altogether unnatural and unphilosophical. The usual course is, to speak of the wrongs and evils of any prevalent practice or custom, until men are awakened to a full conception of their enormity, and to an earnest desire to be free from them, and then they will find a reasonable and appropriate remedy. If the slave-holders of the South were fully awakened to the wrongs and abominations of their peculiar institution and to an earnest wish to free themselves from all connection with it, they would, under the guidance of God, soon find what they would regard as a reasonable remedy. But if they take the position lately taken by Gov. Hammond, that they will not give up Slavery, it will be impossible, I fear, for even the Almighty himself, to suggest a remedy which, in that state of mind, they would regard as reasonable and appropriate. I do not, therefore, you perceive, agree with you the opinion, in that nothing must be said upon the subject of Slavery until an infallible remedy is proposed. My view is, that we

must continue to speak of the wrongs and evils of the system, until the whole community, North and South, are awakened to an earnest desire to free the country from its blighting influences, and then they will unitedly seek and speedily find an appropriate remedy.

4th. You say that I have lived at the South long enough to know, that the two races cannot occupy the same country in peace. But do they not now occupy the same country in peace? and that, too, when one of the races sees every thing in its condition to arouse war? And will that race be less inclined to live in peace, when treated with justice and kindness? And will the other race be less disposed to peace, when acting under the Gospel principle of doing to others as they would have others do to them, than they now are, when exposed to all the temptations incident to the possession and exercise of irresponsible power? Still further — are there not now living among you, many free people of color? and living, too, under burdens and disabilities imposed by the whites, well calculated to exasperate and enrage them? and are they not peaceably disposed? Would they be any less peaceably disposed, even though their numbers were greatly multiplied, if relieved of these burdens and

disabilities, and allowed their equal rights? I must confess that I cannot see the difficulty to which you allude, if both races are actuated by the right spirit. And I believe that the experiment of emancipation, which has been tried in the West Indies, has not resulted in general blood-shed, but that the two races do there occupy the same country in peace. True, if you say, we *will* hold them as slaves, and *will not* have them among us in the enjoyment of freedom, the two races cannot occupy the same country in peace. But the difficulty, as it seems to me, would arise from a want of the right spirit on the part of those who say this.

5th. You ask, if we at the North are willing to receive the emancipated slaves and remunerate the widow and orphan when deprived of their all? My answer is, that we have never been asked to do these things, and we cannot tell what we should be willing to do, until we are asked. My individual opinion is, that if the people of the South should come forward and say to the people of the North, We have been born to an inheritance, which imposes upon us a weight too burdensome to be borne, and yet we need assistance to enable us to free ourselves from all connection with it; we wish that a portion of our slaves, when eman-

cipated, may be received and appointed to an inheritance at the North, and we desire funds to supply the wants of the destitute widow and orphan, — should such a request be made, in all honesty and good faith, from the South to the North, it is my individual opinion, that it would be promptly and liberally met. At least, the query ought not to be urged in the spirit of a taunt, until the request has been made, and in good faith. Thus far, the North has been asked, not to receive the emancipated slave to the enjoyment of liberty, but to return the fugitive to his master's control and most probably to his master's lash.

6th. You seem to think that we of the North ought not to speak upon the subject of Slavery, because northern men have been active in the slave trade. I admit that they have been so. But if our fathers have grievously wronged the sons of Africa, in bringing them in bondage, is that a reason why we, their sons, should neglect all efforts to have their wrongs redressed? Is it not a still stronger reason, why we should attempt to redress the wrongs which our fathers, (ignorantly, we hope,) have done to an unoffending race? And I am willing to go farther, and suppose that even now, northern men are directly or indirectly engaged in this

unholy traffic. This circumstance, were it known to be true, would make it, as it seems to me, more imperiously our duty to protest against this system of American Slavery. If it has laid its unholy blight upon the affections, and its paralyzing influence upon the consciences of our neighbors, it is surely high time that those of us who perceive the evils of the system, were doing something to remove it from the land.

7th. You speak of the influence of old men and young from the North, in perpetuating vice and immorality among the slaves. This I learned and lamented while at the South. Against this, I have raised my voice at the North since my return. But you allow yourself in the use of a figure of speech, when you say that your own people have too much pride to associate with the blacks. Surely you cannot expect that assertion to be received as the sober statement of the truth, by one who has lived at the South, and learned, while there, more than he is willing to state, of the guilt that in this respect attaches itself to individuals of all classes, to the native Southerner and to the emigrant from the North, to the aristocratic and high spirited, as well as to the low and degraded. Still, to whatever portion of the com-

munity this stain may most fully attach itself, you admit its existence, and its unholy character. Is it not, therefore, the duty of Christian ministers especially, to protest against the *system* which naturally tends to such results?

8th. I have reserved to my closing paragraph, the charge you bring against those of us, who have affixed our names to that Protest, of being madmen. The charge itself does not disturb me, when I remember that we are not the first, against whom it has been brought. We learn, from the tenth chapter of John, that when our Saviour had uttered truths, which his hearers were not able to gainsay, some of them said, "He is mad and hath a devil: why hear ye him?" And we are assured in scripture, that the disciple cannot expect to be above his master in this respect. If the holy Jesus was charged with being a madman, for proclaiming and bearing witness to the truth, shall his disciples be disturbed, if, when they proclaim and bear witness to the truth, they are subjected to the same charge? You say that, as madmen, we would throw fire into powder. But what is the fire that we throw? and where have we thrown it? The Protest contains no denunciation, except of sin, no manifestation of bitterness and wrath, no appeal to the passions.

It is a calm, solemn and earnest, but affectionate assertion of the truth, addressed, not to the slave, to excite his discontent, but to the reason and conscience of the master. We have thrown no fire but that of truth, and we have cast it, not upon the passions, but addressed it to the reason and the conscience. We have hoped that it might convince the reason, melt the conscience, and warm the heart. If, in your reception of it, you close your reason, conscience and affections against it, and present only the passions, it may fall upon an explosive magazine. But surely the great body of men at the South are not men of mere inflammable passions. This you will not assert. They are men of reason and of conscience. They will carefully consider and conscientiously weigh the statements of that Protest. They will rightly appreciate the sacred regard for conscience and for duty, for the will of God and the good of man, under which it was put forth. If it is fraught with error, they will point out all that may be erroneous in its principles and conclusions. If, as I sincerely believe, it is but the expression of truth, (and you have not, in your letter, objected to the truth of the Protest,) it will eventually do good. You say that you expected better things of me. If

I have forfeited your good opinion, it has been because I have conscientiously followed my convictions of duty. If I have done contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, if I have disregarded the voice of public opinion, and of popular applause, it is because in moral and spiritual matters I do not recognize their authority; it is because, in these things, there is to me another King, one Jesus, to whom, in my Christian profession, I have sworn allegiance.

With these remarks upon your letter, and with the expression of my sincere hope that, on this, as on all other subjects of moral duty, we may both be led by the enlightening influences of God's spirit, to see eye to eye, and with earnest wishes for your welfare and happiness here, and your enjoyment of heavenly bliss hereafter, I return to my appropriate sphere, the quiet labors of a country pastor, from which I have felt myself called in providence, and by your letter, to turn aside, long enough to give you a respectful answer.

Very truly yours,

JASON WHITMAN.



